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ABSTRACT

Unemployment is the focus of this transcript of a radio series published as an electronic weekly magazine concerned with issues in education. The second of a 2-part series, this program incorporates studio interviews with Elliot Liebow, anthropologist and author of "Tally's Corner" and with William Harwood, of New Schools Exchange, who both react to a series of sound portraits of people in what could be considered "dead end" jobs. The role of schools is examined on the question of relevancy to jobs and whether schools should be training young people to do certain kinds of work, and if so, which people will receive training for which jobs. A resource list on education and work is included. (TA)

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

TRANSCRIPT FOR PROGRAM SCHEDULED FOR BROADCAST

THE WEEK OF AUGUST 9, 1976

Program No. 41

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Options in Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SCHOOLING AND JOBS -- PART II

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
ELLIOT LIEBOW, Anthropologist & Author of Tally's Corner -- Reacts to a Series of Sound Portraits Prepared by Reporter Keith Talbot -- And Talks About "Dead-end" jobs	2-9
WILLIAM HARWOOD, of New Schools Exchange -- Career Preparation: Should Schools be Training Young People to do Certain Kinds of Work -- Also Reacts to Sound Portraits	10-19
RESOURCE LIST	21

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The Executive Producer is John Merrow. The Acting Producer is JoEllyn Rackleff, and the Co-Host is Wendy Blair.

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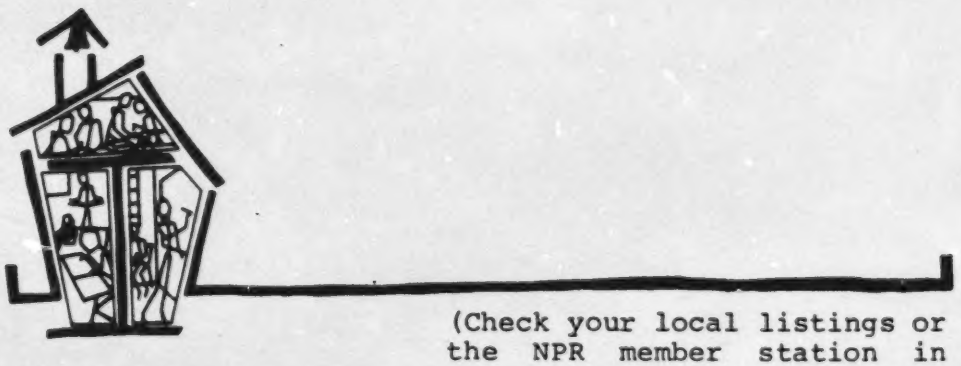

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SCHOOLING AND JOBS

PART II

(OPENING MUSICAL THEME)

BLAIR: I'm Wendy Blair with OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a news magazine about all the issues in education -- from the ABC's of preschool to the alphabet soup of government programs. If you've ever been to school, we have something that will interest you.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. This week we conclude our two-part series on Schooling and Jobs: Can you Get There From Here? Last week we examined the problem of under employment -- this week, unemployment.

> LIEBOW: What it means to be unemployed, the kind of feelings that people have and walk around with, or even when they're threatened with their jobs, to see the smart secretary -- real smart gals walk around who know that they're smarter than the guys they work for, and it eats them up, and they've got to swallow it and live with it and smell it in them -- their own sense of frustration, when they've got so much that they can do, and they're kept from doing it.

BLAIR: That's anthropologist Elliot Liebow, author of Tally's Corner, talking about the psychological impact of unemployment and under employment. Last week we looked at the phenomenon of under employment and talked with James O'Toole of the Center for the Study of the Future and author of The Reserved Army of the Under Employed. O'Toole described the millions of Americans, mostly college educated, whose expectations for meaningful work are frustrated in jobs which they see as dull and unchallenging. Their jobs, in short, are too small for their spirits.

MERROW: And the personal consequences of under employment are felt off the job, because work is perhaps the single most important human activity. If you don't feel good about your work, it's hard to feel good about yourself. It's hard to recreate yourself in your leisure time. O'Toole also expressed a real concern that we have been over selling education in this country by promising young people better jobs and more money if they go to college. And six percent of last year's high school graduates went on to college. But half of those won't graduate, so we have a college-oriented public school system, even though only about 25 percent of our young people complete college. These 25 percent are candidates for under employment. What about the others -- the students who are tracked into business or general education courses in high school?

BLAIR: What you're going to hear is an experimental format. John asked Dr. Liebow to react to a group of sound portraits of people in their working situations -- portraits constructed by Reporter Keith Talbot. If it's true, as Freud has written, that work is man's strongest tie to reality, then our experiment should provide some insights into the relationship between people and their work.

First, John asked Elliot Liebow to define a "dead-end" job.

ELLIOT LIEBOW

LIEBOW: Maybe all jobs are dead-end jobs, but whether or not we treat them as dead-end jobs, whether or not the society or the individual has it characterized as a dead-end job depends on whether or not that job is self desirable or not. Certainly a job is the main way we have of making a living. It's the main way - the principal way - that most people have of providing themselves with food and shelter. It's the main way we have of staking a claim to some of the goods and services that are offered in this society. It's the main way of finding our place in the society. The job that we have - to a large extent - tells us how much social status we have, determines who our social relationships will be carried out with. It often determines where we will live, what kind of a house we will live in, what kind of education we'll be able to provide for our children.

MERROW: What are the jobs that are dead-end jobs? What identifies them as dead-end jobs?

LIEBOW: Well, characteristically, they're the jobs that people put at the very bottom of the job ladder. In the past, it's been things like garbage collectors.

MERROW: It's not any more?

LIEBOW: Well, it's very hard to imagine a dead-end job, such as garbage collection which can attract -- let's say, if you announce as the City of San Francisco did a couple of years back - announce say a hundred openings and 3,000 men show up the night before and camp outside in the school yard in order to be in line for those jobs -- it's hard to imagine those as being dead-end jobs when they're so desperately wanted by so many people.

MERROW: Now, what took that out of the category of being a dead-end job?

LIEBOW: Unionizing that job and bringing the wage level up to a living wage.

MERROW: So, it's money and benefits.

LIEBOW: And job security.

MERROW: So, even though it is a dirty job . . .

LIEBOW: It didn't get any cleaner -- but job security and a living wage lifted, I think, that job out of the category of dead-end jobs.

MERROW: What are some of the dead-end jobs that exist, though?

LIEBOW: Well, I think trash/garbage collection are still dead-end jobs where they're very low-paying jobs. Janitors are dead-end jobs; typically, I think, manual labor jobs which don't pay well are the ones we characterize as dead-end jobs. Let me qualify that. Not just manual jobs -- I would guess for some people being a low-paid bank teller or a low-paid clerk.

MERROW: Why do you make it for some people?

LIEBOW: Well, I think that some of us would be disinclined to characterize as a bad job or dead-end job any white collar job. If

you went, let's say, to a very low income group of men and women whose only jobs have been manual labor or domestic work, and you ask them what they thought about a bank teller's job, they would automatically, I think, think that that's a fine job, or at least, a hell of a lot better than any they have access to themselves, and would, perhaps, not characterize it as a dead-end job. For them it might be desirable because it's clean, regular working hours, and maybe job security. It might well be a relative thing.

MERROW: Dead-endedness -- what does that tell a person? What is the symbolic message or the direct message to someone who works full time and makes three or four thousand dollars a year?

LIEBOW: I think that the message is very clear. The message is that that person isn't needed. The message is that whatever contribution that person is making to the rest of the community, it's simply not valued enough to enable him to support himself and his family. And he's being told, in effect, that his contribution just isn't worth a damn.

MERROW: I'd like to run one of these tapes by you. This is the guy who works on a Greyhound bus. I don't know if we're going to have a problem here. All the people you're about to hear are white. Your book Tally's Corner is about Blacks, and under employment and unemployment and the social patterns that result among Black people. I don't know -- are there real distinctions to be made?

LIEBOW: I think there are some distinctions that need to be made, but I think for purposes of this particular discussion, when we're talking about jobs and the importance of jobs to people, that we can disregard the color.

MAN: My name is James N. Murphy, and I work for The Greyhound Corporation as a baggage clerk. I thought a lot about, after coming out of high school, about maybe going in to college, or what have you, but I was uncertain. You know, I didn't have anything planned for sure. I finished school in 1955, and, so, I just by luck missed the Korean War. So, at the time, you know, jobs were fairly hard to find. Making as much money as you made here at Greyhound, you know, it was fairly good pay at the time. And I thought that was the thing. And, so, I grabbed it, and first one thing led to another, and before I knew it, I had over twenty years, you know, hung up into this company.

We load and unload buses, check baggage. We, more or less, pull the baggage off the buses and freight off the buses, and sort it, and load it aboard the outgoing schedules.

In a lot other departments there's a lot more pressure on you, and this and that and the other. I don't know -- that's one reason why I like working outside, see, because it's not so much pressure on you as if it would be maybe working as a ticket agent or maybe working up in an office or something, see. And I'm the type of person that never could be strapped to a desk, you know, because I like to be on the go all the time. And you, more or less, know what you have to do, and you go ahead and do it, and that's it.

LIEBOW: What's very striking -- if you take what he says at face value, here's a guy loading baggage on to buses. I would guess most people would say that's a kind of dead-end job, and here's a guy that's put twenty years of his life into it and seems reasonably content with his life, with the investment he's made in it. I think that it points up, in part anyway, this business of money. The first thing he grabbed at was a job that paid a decent wage. He grabbed at it, he said. He grabbed at this job because of the money it paid, and he stuck to it. He stuck to it for twenty years. He said he doesn't even know where the time has gone, and there are some things about his job, quite apart from the money, that he seems to actively like and enjoy. He likes working outside. I suspect a part of that means that he's not under anybody's direct supervision, being told what to do all the time, and having somebody look over your shoulder. That kind of supervision, almost spying, seems to be one of the things that most people don't like about their jobs.

MERROW: That's right. He said he didn't want that.

LIEBOW: And here he's free of that. He sees what has to be done, and he goes and does it. He's got a responsibility, and he takes some pride in the kinds of things that he does and the decisions that he makes. So, here's a job, for example, which we might normally consider a dead-end, which is, to him, a perfectly satisfying job. I think mainly because -- or in large part -- because he's able to live on it. It would be interesting to know whether he's able to support a family on his wage, and whether he would mind if his son wanted to be a baggage clerk, or whatever -- I'm not sure what he called himself.

MERROW: What would that tell you? Suppose he says this job is fine for me, but I wouldn't want my son to do it?

LIEBOW: It would be important to know why he wouldn't want his son to do it. I suspect that he might think that there are other ways and better ways of making a living, that there are other ways and better ways of gaining more attention from other people.

MERROW: But you can live with that without thinking poorly of yourself? I mean, it seems to me that would be a normal human aspiration, to want your children to somehow do better than you do. And, so I could say I want my kid to do more than I'm doing without necessarily thinking badly of myself, or the things I do.

LIEBOW: But asking what you expect of your children or would like your children to have is a little different from asking a man whether it would be okay for his child to end up as he ended up. I think that, then, he's for it. If you say, would it bother you if your son ended up doing this job, if he didn't think badly about the job himself for himself, I think he'd be inclined to say, "No, that would be all right, but I wish that ..." And I think that here's a case of a man who seems relatively content with himself and the job that he's had for most of his working life. We shouldn't put him down for this. I think it's too easy for people on the outside, especially middle-class people, to put such a man down for being content with making a living at what is generally considered fairly menial, a low status job. He doesn't see it as a dead-end job. He sees it as a job worth having.

BLAIR: Elliot Liebow, author of Tally's Corner. In case you joined us late, let me explain that Dr. Liebow is listening and reacting to a series of sound portraits of people at work. Does school make a difference?

WOMAN: I work for Avis Rent A Car. I'm a rental sales agent. I rent cars.

TALBOT: When you were in school, what did you think you were going to do during your life?

WOMAN: I was going to be a teacher. I was supposedly really bright. But, you know, I got married, and you don't go back to school.

MAN: I do waiter work.

TALBOT: When you were in school, what did you think that you were going to be when you grew up?

MAN: Nothing. Just what I am right now -- nothing.

TALBOT: You had no idea?

MAN: Well, when I was coming up, people just didn't pay no mind no how. They just went on to work and forgot about all this other crap, and let the rocks fall the way they come, because that's the way it's going to be anyhow. You might think that you can force it, but you can't force it.

WOMAN: I work for the American Telegraph & Telephone Company.

TALBOT: So, why are you here now at night?

WOMAN: I'm a special relief operator.

TALBOT: I see -- when you were in school, what did you think that you were going to do when you grew up?

WOMAN: I'll tell you the truth -- I just finished the eighth grade.

TALBOT: So, you never had any help deciding what you would do?

WOMAN: No, I made my own way.

TALBOT: How do you feel about that?

WOMAN: I'm great.

TALBOT: Do you think your job is what's called a dead-end job?

WOMAN: Oh, no, no. Anyone--any job that you might have, you can always advance. There's always advancement if you apply yourself.

TALBOT: Do you plan to advance further?

WOMAN: No, they want younger people today, and they don't seem to have as much place for the older people with the years of service with the company as the younger people.

TALBOT: So, that's sort of a pressure on you?

WOMAN: That's right. So, I'm not expecting any advancements. I had reached my goal. I accomplished what I started out to do, so I'm satisfied, and I'm happy.

MERROW: A lot went by in those. There's a lot in there.

LIEBOW: There is a lot, but it's kind of difficult and a little patronizing for us to sit here and try and analyze what lies behind or what kind of feelings lie behind the words that were expressed, but it's fun doing anyway.

That last woman was very special. You could almost hear her pride in her voice, and the satisfaction with herself. I think it was the last woman who said she was "great."

MERROW: Yes, right -- "I'm great." She's a telephone operator.

LIEBOW: And her job wasn't a dead-end job at all, she said -- no job is a dead-end job. But she, then, defined no job as dead-end job, because you can always improve yourself. And, yet, when she was asked if she could advance, she said "no." I think we could let that go. It was pretty clear that she was satisfied with herself, with her life. She said she was happy. She said she achieved her goal, and I think that that goal, whatever it was, is the kind of goal that most of us share with her. The goal, at least for most people, of what they want of their working life is to make a living, is to support themselves, to support their families, by doing a job that someone else considers is useful and is willing to pay them for doing.

MERROW: Dr. Liebow, what about the waiter, the guy who in response to the question on what he expected to be, said "nothing -- just what I am -- nothing."

LIEBOW: Also, it sounded as though he were the only Black person.

MERROW: He's not Black -- he's white.

LIEBOW: Oh, he was white.

MERROW: But he said a very quotable line -- "Just let the rocks fall where they may." Somehow that echoed for me what you were saying earlier about people who were born into that, who were living out their inheritance, if you will. Did it strike you that way?

LIEBOW: Very much so. There's a man that seems to be saying that he expected nothing, and he got nothing. So, he's not disappointed. But he clearly feels put upon. The world has singled him out, and gave him rocks. I'm not sure that one could say that he's content, because you get what you expect. It doesn't necessarily make for contentment, and he still sees himself as nothing.

MERROW: Nor does it mean you deserve what you get.

LIEBOW: Nor does it mean you deserve what you get, and I think he said there, "I'm nothing" when he was asked.

MERROW: Well, your analysis of society would suggest that there are a lot of people for whom that is their inheritance -- the way things are set up, that if your're poor, if your parents are poor and you're born into poverty, that's the hand you're going to be dealt.

LIEBOW: Right -- there was one other woman at the beginning. It also came into her inheritance, too. She said she wanted to be a teacher, but she got married and had a family -- and you know how it is. And that's a kind of inheritance that people come into, that women come into. You may have career aspirations and job aspirations, but at the same time you know that everybody expects, and you yourself expect, that what you'll end up doing is getting married and staying home. And she had to forego the business of being a teacher. She did, and ended up being a ticket agent for Avis Rent A Car. I don't know that she was discontent with that, except that it did sound as if she would have really liked to have been a teacher, and that she had been identified as an especially bright kid in school. But here, she was diverted by marriage and homemaking.

MERROW: If that's accurate, that schools are part of a cycle where you come into your inheritance, how would you break it? How would you change it?

LIEBOW: Well, I have one simple-minded answer, and that is this business of guaranteed jobs. I think the way in which to break this cycle is to make the prospect of having a job, in being able to support yourself and independents not only a possibility for everybody, but a guarantee, and take that anxiety and that failure out of peoples' lives and make it possible for them to do that. And I think then you break all kinds of cycles. You break the poverty cycle. You break the cycle of female-headed families. You break all the kinds of things that tend to be associated with deep poverty in our cities.

MERROW: I'd like you to listen to our last sound portrait of somebody who has made it, describing how he made it.

> MAN: My name is Kenneth Flynn. I live in Oxon Hill, Maryland. I am currently working for Larry Ewell Realtor, who is licensed in Maryland.
>
> When I went into the Navy, I was 22, from a college situation. When I finally got my degree, I was 43. And I feel really good about that. Certainly, my education after all those years seems complete to me -- a tremendous sense of being whole, being competitive, being, you know, one of the rest of the people.
>
> If you're looking for a nice straight continuity of education -- high school, college, and whatnot -- you're not going to find it from me, unfortunately, I guess. My family -- my mother and father -- were in export, and there are aspects about this discontinuity of schooling that I could say were really nice. I got to travel. I got to know people. I got to know a foreign language. That's all well and good, but when it came to the hard realities of my making a living, or my having a career, those social experiences really didn't help me one damn bit.
>
> One of the better things I did to educate myself was to opt for a course by Dr. Stanley Hymen, and I'm not sure which university sponsors him at this moment -- I think it's Georgetown, but I could be wrong. He is becoming well known, but what he essentially tells a person seeking a job is that

you must become like that person, that is, the person interviewing you. So, the breaks in education, my traveling, probably have made me more suitable to that kind of, if you will, rapid adaption than some other things I might have done.

And the ultimate result is, today in my occupation, I am helping someone else. And in doing that, I'm making a pretty decent living out of it.

The neatest thing that happens is when you have a person who can barely afford to buy a home -- yet, you're able to find one for them, and you know that the're happy. And, then, have them move in, and perhaps pay them a call and bring over a bucket of chicken or something, soup or whatever -- if you've ever moved from a home, you know what a hassle it is -- and actually see them smile and thank you. This is where the gratification comes in -- "Well if I can do it, I hope that the next one is perhaps as much fun for me as it is for them."

Excuse me, I'm going to pick this up -- Good afternoon, Larry Ewell Realtors -- may I help you?

LIEWBOW: Another thing that comes through here, that I would like to harp on once more, is the big deal he made out of making a decent living, when he talked about, yes, he enjoys what he does, and he makes a decent living. Making a decent living is absolutely crucial, I think, to any kind of job satisfaction.

The other thing that's striking is the fact that here's a guy who no doubt is as good at selling himself as he is at selling a product -- he's a salesman. He's proud of it, he's good at it, and he makes a decent living. I think he perhaps makes a -- my guess would be that he's not properly assessing the importance of his early background, that he's not quite as much of a self-made person as he thinks, and none of us are. I think to the degree that he's made it that he probably owes a lot more to his childhood experience, to the traveling, to the broadening experiences that he says his parents' business gave him than he's willing to attribute to it.

And here's a guy who sounds like he's happy in his work. Also, he makes a big point, too, the fact that he's doing something for other people. I suspect strongly that that's a very important ingredient of job satisfaction for most of us -- we've got to be able to see, at least in part, that what we're doing has a direct effect and meets an immediate need of somebody else.

MERROW: Did you feel that in the Greyhound guy? Did you get a sense that he felt that what he was doing was somehow important?

LIEBOW: I don't think he put it as explicitly as this guy, as the salesman did, but I suspect if you ask him about it, I think he would see it as something very valuable.

MERROW: If we have a need to see that, then that would certainly help us find it?

LIEBOW: I don't know about a need to see it, but I think that to be satisfied with what we do, we need to see it. There are a lot of people, I think, who are at jobs they feel are absolutely worthless, or that they might even be harmful, and they keep on at the jobs. They don't like the idea of doing something that's not especially useful, but a job is a job. It would be interesting to know what a well paid fireman on a diesel train thinks about his job -- the featherbedding, what the impact is of carrying out what you know is a sinecure -- you know that you have a job that isn't worth doing, that nobody needs and, yet, you're payed well to do it anyway. It would be interesting to look at the effects of that on that individual, on his relationships with his wife, or hers with her husband, relationships with their children, with their friends, and family, because I think it's very destructive.

MERROW: In terms of contempt for yourself for what you're doing?

LIEBOW: Yes, I think that it's important to feel that you're making a useful contribution.

BLAIR: Elliot Liebow, author and anthropologist, talking about jobs and job satisfaction. He leaves us with an important question, John, about just what roles schools play in sorting young people into different jobs.

MERROW: Earlier he used a phrase - "coming into your inheritance" - to describe the men of Talley's Corner and the woman who wanted to be a teacher, but quit school to raise a family. According to his analysis, the United States is a class society, and the accidental birth largely determines how and where we end up. For the last decade, in the War on Poverty and the programs of The Great Society, schools have been used to try to prevent disadvantaged children from coming into their inheritance of a life of poverty, ignorance, and indignity. There's a great debate raging right now about whether all those special school programs are making much difference.

BLAIR: It seemed to me that James O'Toole on our first program in this series and, now, Elliot Liebow have different solutions to the problems we're looking at. O'Toole says we have to redesign many of the jobs so that they show respect for the people performing them, and he says we have to stop selling education as a guaranteed ticket to more money and a prestigious job. Education is worth it in its own right, he stresses.

Elliot Liebow, on the other hand, would like to guarantee employment at a fair wage to anyone who wants to work, and he'd guarantee that the jobs really need to be done.

MERROW: I find myself remembering what Dr. Liebow wrote about work: "The job of lathe operator, assembly line worker, a truck driver, a secretary -- these tend to be dead-end jobs, too, but they are not bad jobs because of it. Not everyone in our society is career oriented. We have a large and relatively stable working-class population which does not aspire to moving up a career ladder. The working man who earns a living and supports his family by doing work that everyone agrees is socially useful does not necessarily want to become a foreman or plant manager or office executive. If he is dissatisfied, it is probably because he wants more of what he has and wants to be more certain of keeping what he has, not because he wants to be something different."

BLAIR: There's some interesting research data that agrees with Liebow -- Project Talent, a research project studying the aptitudes and careers of over 400,000 Americans has found that 11 years after high school 80 percent of those studied described their jobs as rewarding. Only 8 percent wished they'd gone into another line of work. It's a carefully drawn sample, which means that the results can be interpreted to represent all high school juniors and seniors in 1960. Half of those students went on to college, and half of that half actually graduated from college.

MERROW: The college drop out rate is the same, but today 60 percent of high school graduates go on to college. According to Project Talent which is funded by the National Institute of Education, the biggest regrets of the group are that they married when they did, that they did not take more training after high school, and that they didn't go on to college. Half the group called high school either valuable or fairly useful. The other half, however, said that for them high school was adequate, at best. Wendy, we're calling this series "Schooling and Jobs," but I'm struck by how little time we've spent talking about what happens in school. It's clear that school and labor are related. For one thing, it was only as child labor became unnecessary or undesirable that high schools came into existence. School has become society's instrument for preparing its children for life, for adult responsibilities, but whether what goes on in schools has much relationship to the world outside is a very real question. The reward structure of schools is designed to encourage more and more schooling. That automatically deals a lot of young people a bad hand. For many young people, high school was simply a holding pattern. For others, it represents an intense competition to get on the next rung of the education ladder, and for the rest it's a consistent reminder that they are of little value.

BLAIR: Next we'll focus a little more sharply on schools themselves, especially the question of career preparation. Should the schools be training young people to do certain kinds of work? And if so, which people will get trained for which jobs.

> HARWOOD: Schools shape peoples' attitudes about work, and basically, the attitude is that you have it made if you don't have to work and you have material possessions and money to throw around. And being able to do something useful is a valuable thing, which our schools don't particularly harp on and don't even ever mention or, in fact, fight against. Anyway, what I'm thinking is that a lot of the people who are doing work in America realize that what they're doing isn't important, and a lot of people who are going to school realize that what they do in the future -- what they're looking for is not a job, but a hustle. They're not looking for work. They're looking for a way to make money and not have to work. It's a different thing than work, and what I'm saying is that the schools and the general society values which the schools only reflect have a lot to do with why people are looking for hustles rather than work.

BLAIR: That's William Harwood of the New Schools Exchange, a clearinghouse for ideas and information about alternative education. We asked Bill Harwood to listen and then react to a series of interviews which John taped with workers in a small Ohio town. The first voice you will hear is that of a young motel clerk who has discovered that after checking people in and out and dusting the lobby, she has an awful lot of time on her hands.

WOMAN: There's some days that, you know, are super boring, but you have to make the best of it. You have to be here. This gives you a lot of time for yourself, you know. I like it. I'd rather stay here than to go look for something else that paid more. It's steady, anyway.

MERROW: Do you demand something from a job?

WOMAN: I guess to be treated like people. We had - you know - I wouldn't want to be stepped on all the time around here. One day is bad enough if, you know, you have a grouchy customer. I wouldn't want it every day, though. You can't say what you think, you know. It wouldn't look too good -- smile and grit your teeth, you know.

MERROW: When you were in school, did you think that you'd be working?

WOMAN: Oh, gee, that's hard to say, because I was planning on being married, anyway. I don't know -- it's just -- the first job I had before I was married and, then, I just had to quit it, because we moved. So, I didn't have much choice to change jobs, but we live right around here. So, as long as we both work around here, we should be here for a long time.

MERROW: Did school prepare you for working?

WOMAN: Well, for a girl at school, you either took business -- or that was about it, really, because most big credit-wise things -- I didn't want to go to college or anything.

MERROW: Are you using those business skills in this job?

WOMAN: Oh, I suppose, yeah. I type some, you know, and the adding maching, and all that stuff, you know, comes in.

MERROW: Some day you may have kids, and they may be girl kids and they'll go through school. Will you tell them anything different about working?

WOMAN: Geez, just do what you like. Just, if you don't like it, get out. Just don't force yourself to have to go and be unhappy all the time. We had a certain manager where I wouldn't want anybody to work under, but they're gone, and it's a lot different, but even I was thinking of moving on, you know. I didn't want to, but some people you just can't get along with, you know. So, I'd just tell them to do what you're happy with and don't force yourself to go in just because of the money and everything.

MERROW: It sounds, though, for you that work is just supplemental, that your husband's job comes first.

WOMAN: Yeah, well, he makes a lot more than I do. Mine just gives us extra money for whatever, extra little goodies that we want, you know. But here lately, you know, it's kind of rough. But, what the heck, it'll get better.

MERROW: You're an optimist.

WOMAN: You gotta be. You gotta be.

WILLIAM H RWOOD

HARWOOD: Do jobs require education? I was thinking here you've got a desk clerk in a motel, and you can teach her anything she needs to know in an hour and a half. She already knows how to read and write and type. You can presuppose that, and that she has a reasonable grasp of how to deal with people as people. But that's about all it presupposes. It doesn't require any particular training. And the second thing I wrote down is what does work mean to most people, and I think that's what work means to most people in modern America. There are 82 million workers, and probably 80 million of them do things that are just jobs. You know, you go in and they tell you what to do. It doesn't make any sense or have anything to do with your life -- you just do it. If you don't like it, you can leave and get another job that doesn't have anything to do with anything.

MERROW: But she seemed reasonably satisfied, wouldn't you say?

HARWOOD: Well, sure, that's all people expect out of jobs. People don't expect jobs that will change the world or something which fulfills them internally. They expect a job which pays them X amount of money, has a lot of security. She mentioned that. Security is a big word in that kind of thing.

MERROW: She said, "I'd rather stay here than look for something else. It's steady."

HARWOOD: Yes, "It's steady, pays the bills, gives us extra goodies."

MERROW: We shouldn't let that woman in the motel go by without talking about her as a woman, and what the schools and perhaps the rest of society have taught her to expect from work. She said, "Well, I was planning on being married -- I didn't have much choice in school -- for a girl there's no choice -- you take business courses."

HARWOOD: Well, she said she took business courses because she didn't want to go college. There are several kinds of sorts that happen in college. We do what we call tracking, and in some places they do it overtly, and in some places they do it covertly.

MERROW: You mean in school.

HARWOOD: But, basically, you've got the dumb class and the kids who are going to college. And that's the first sort. You're either a college prep, or you're a dummy. And if you're a dummy, that means that you take courses that teach you how to do a job. And if you're a woman, that means you take courses to be a cosmetician. You take Home Ec, you take business courses, and you learn to be a nurse. I don't know -- you've got X amount of choices in any public school, and they set the curriculum up to shape people into this thing. I mean, the discrimination beyond that is phenomenal.

MERROW: I think the next piece we're going to listen to, Bill, touches on and shows a beginning awareness to that man and woman kind of thing. These are two people working at -- I suppose it's not an advertisement -- there are two people who are working at a local McDonald's restaurant.

MERROW: How long have you been a Manager of McDonald's?

MAN: Oh, not quite two years, now.

MERROW: What's particularly challenging about working in the restaurant business, the fast food business?

MAN: To me, it's the people that work for us. Mostly it's almost 90 percent high school kids, and there's something different that happens every day. There are problems every five minutes that you've got to help them out with, or they help you out with. And it's just amazing -- you get a whole different insight on high school people here than the people you see on the street.

MERROW: How is it different?

MAN: Usually they're people that want to work, and they have to work, and they enjoy working. This is a whole new breed of people. Those aren't the people you see roaming the campus -- they're people who want to work. They're good, solid, basic people. They're going to go on to college, or they're going to take over their dad's business, or they're going into the restaurant business, and they really enjoy working. And I enjoy working with them.

MERROW: So, you're getting a different perspective on young people?

MAN: Oh, yeah -- my opinion of young people has done a 180 degree turnaround in the last two years.

GIRL: And we all do the same job, and we have fun at it. We all do the same thing -- we greet our customers, we fill their orders, and take their money, and have a nice day. Most of the guys I know, now, work. I wouldn't know of any that didn't. I think, now, working is just part of a teenager's life. It's something that they do just naturally, like something they were growing up to do -- working is a part of their teenage life.

MERROW: That's true for you, also?

GIRL: Yes it is.

MERROW: Is this your first job?

GIRL: No, it isn't. It's my third job.

MERROW: What do you think will happen to you after high school? What do you think you'll do?

GIRL: I'm planning on going to college. I hope that's what is going to happen to me.

MERROW: Why? What do you think you'll do after college?

GIRL: Well, I want to go into the nursing field. About the only thing I can take now in high school is psychology, sociology, chemistry, science, things like this, that'll prep me for college, but it won't prep me for a job right after school.

MERROW: According to the manager, and according to the waitress, the kids who were working there were college-bound kids. The girl said that working is part of a teenager's life, but that McDonald's was having people who, in fact, were passing the time. That girl, hopefully, wasn't learning skills that she's going to use later on. She was making some money. What about the kids who aren't college bound? I wounder what kind of jobs they had while they were in school.

HARWOOD: First of all, I don't want to skip over the point of college bound and assume that it means anything in particular. There's a nice book called The Great Training Robbery, and it documents very concisely the fact that education doesn't necessarily mean that you will make more money, that you will have a better job, that you will do more productive work, or anything else. After the Lyndon Johnson era and HEW Social Service Development, it's been possible for all-American boys to go to college, and all-American girls, too. And this has been done through a tremendous amount of financial aid. The point of all this story is that all of those people who went to college don't necessarily (1) find their education any more relevant to their lives than the people who've been to high school, and (2) do any better at making money than the people who don't go to college.

Okay, you're right -- we sort out the kids, those who are going to college and the dummies. And what happens to the dummies? Well, lots of things happen to the dummies -- they get jobs in construction crews, factories.

MERROW: The point ought to be made, though, that schools have a structure where they are set up to do best for the kids who are theoretically going on to more schooling. Schooling prepares you for more schooling, and if you drop out along the way, you're sorted out in a negative kind of way. There isn't a point in school where someone can choose, or a choice is made that you're going to go in a vocational direction, and that is good. And you're going to go in a college direction, and that is good. It's not done that way. If you're good, you get to go on to more and more school, and I think in the first program on this series, talking about the phenomena of under employment, the extent to which people are coming out of college and discovering that, in fact, there aren't the kind of jobs waiting for them that they had been led to believe would be there --and there's a real kind of backlash of awareness, and even resentment.

HARWOOD: Well, I think that what the school should concentrate on doing, is giving people a sense of their own history, skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, etc. And their own history should include how they fit into the human race. It should give them things that we don't consider of adequate importance to peoples' lives, which will be cultural and artistic. It should give people a sense of music, a sense of art, a sense of themselves as something else besides a person who performs a function -- a machine.

MERROW: That whole person, of course, has to know that he or she is going to work and what to expect from work.

HARWOOD: In the course of a conversation about what goes on in the world and what you need to be able to do and think about in a liberal education -- that comes up.

MERROW: It comes up in the next piece, too. We have a father and a son who are both talking about jobs and particularly the son worrying about his own future.

MERROW: How long have you been manager of this gas station?

MAN: Four years.

MERROW: What did you do before that?

MAN: Excavating -- it's good work, but I just wanted to get out of it, because just like anything else, I'd just rather do something like this here.

MERROW: Why?

MAN: Oh, I like to be around the public, deal with the public, really, mainly. You know, you just got to know how to take people, I guess. It's just something that was born in you -- I don't know how to explain it really. It's just something that you've got to do -- I don't know, just understand people.

MERROW: Did you have to go to school to qualify to be a manager of the gas station?

MAN: Yeah, it takes about a month of schooling.

MERROW: What did they teach you? What did they tell you?

MAN: Bookkeeping the first two weeks, and the second two weeks a little bit of TBA, and salesman . . .

MERROW: You'd better tell us what TBA is.

MAN: TBA is Tires, Batteries and Accessories.

MERROW: How about kids? Do you have kids of your own?

MAN: Yeah.

MERROW: Do you talk about work with them?

MAN: Not really, not really to get down to talk to them about it, no.

MERROW: Do you suppose kids growing up today have any better idea about what work means than you did when you were a kid?

MAN: Kids today, I don't think really know what it is now to work than it was back then. It's a lot harder now, because there's not as many jobs.

MERROW: Do you think kids ought to be prepared better in some way for the changing jobs, or the fact that life is complicated?

MAN: Yeah, I think a person ought to know at least three or four different skills, really. You know, it's like me, if something were to happen here, I can always go back to excavating, or I can go back into contracting work -- that's what my dad was in for 35 years.

MERROW: How about your kids? Are they acquiring skills in school?

MAN: I got one right there -- my stepson right there. He's trying to learn this here, but like I say, they ought to know at least three or four different things, you know, in order to get by in this world today, because it's rough. I think we all know that.

MERROW: Do you think the schools are doing that?

MAN: No, not really. I don't think they are. They're just preparing them just to, you know, if you can go out and get a job, get it, but I don't thing they're really what you call preparing the kids for it, no.

MERROW: And this is the stepson just referred to. I guess you're a trainee here?

SON: Yeah, I'm just learning, trying to learn a little bit about cars and stuff.

MERROW: And you're in school, still?

SON: Yeah, I'm a senior at Hays.

MERROW: What do you think you'll do when you finish high school?

SON: I'll probably stay here and learn as much as I can -- I don't know after that. I might go to technical school or something.

MERROW: How about your buddies in school?

SON: As far as what kind of jobs they're looking for, a lot of them are working in gas stations, at least most of my friends are. I know a lot of them have to do with cars. Really, that's about the thing to get into.

MERROW: You're 17 now. Do you have any sense of what you'll be doing when you're 50?

SON: Well, hopefully, I'd like to get into recording.

MERROW: Into recording -- here take this.

SON: No, not yet.

MERROW: What kind of recording?

SON: Oh, just producing, or maybe something like that.

MERROW: What makes you want to do that?

SON: I like music a lot, a whole lot. It doesn't have anything to do with gas stations, or anything. It's just like a hope or something.

MERROW: Do you have any training along those lines?

SON: Not too much. I'm in a band, but, you know, not anything with producing -- well, producing sort of, but not recording, or anything like that.

MERROW: So, that's a lot of learning on your own.

HARWOOD: Well, that was a much more interesting tape. There you have a fellow who has quite an active mind. For some reason, he's fairly well aware of his situation and his future possibilities, which are dim and chancey. He has a real developed personal interest in music, which he is aware that the education system and this society have no interest whatsoever in helping him develop. And on the one hand, he was quite clear that in his own situation where he did have an aim, and he was a future-oriented person and he was fairly well aware of what was going on, and definitely a practical kind of person, there was no way for him to effect the process.

MERROW: That father we just heard said that he felt that kids should learn three or four trades so that they'd be prepared because it's a rough world. It strikes me on its face that it's not possible for a school to teach me or you or anybody else three or four trades by the end of high school.

HARWOOD: I don't believe that. I think it would be possible to teach kids quite a number of vocations by the end of high school.

MERROW: Within school?

HARWOOD: Well, not within the school building in a classroom -- I don't think you can learn how to do anything in particular in a school classroom, but by the time I finished school -- I was born on a farm -- and I was a pretty good farmer by the time I was 12 years old. I also, incidentally, picked up pretty good skills at mechanics. I knew how to weld. I knew how to operate almost any machine.

MERROW: You're not telling me you learned those in school, though?

HARWOOD: No, I learned them out of school, but what I'm saying is, if you address the school program to the idea of learning how to do useful trades, and it wouldn't be any trouble at all to take the existing resources, the existing teachers, and address them to that thing, and teach kids a half a dozen trades by the time they finished high school. And they could have some working experience in each one. I mean, it's amazing what you can learn on a job as a carpenter's apprentice in six months, especially if you're backed up by the shop teacher at school who is teaching kids to operate machinery, who is teaching kids the theoretical basis, teaching them about materials, and teaching how to do mechanical drawing. It's absolutely amazing what you can teach any kid in a six month or a year period.

You could take say one vocation a year. If that was the aim of the schools, I think they could do that. What I'm saying is, that we have to have focus about what the school can do, and if that focus suited that particular community or that particular father or that particular kid, I think the school could fulfill that function fine.

MERROW: But aren't you doing the same kind of thing that you're accusing colleges of doing, and that I accuse colleges of doing -- that is, creating false expectations in people. If you go around saying, somehow implying that the best kind of job is the thing you love to do, that is not going to be possible, because there are 82 million workers in this country. For 70 million of them they are not going to be able to have jobs that are interesting and challenging and exciting.

HARWOOD: Well, see, I think that's bloody nonsense. I think that the kinds of things that people want to do are coupled with what needs to be done in the society. And the kind of concerns you brought up about jobs are concerns that all people have. You need a certain amount of money to exist in this society. You need a reasonably sane work situation. You need to know that when you're old society won't discard you. That is a major concern, but that has nothing to do with what you actually do. If people put in an honest day's work doing something that's useful, they should be paid the same as everybody else. That shouldn't be a primary concern. What should be a primary concern is -- well, in this case, the fellow was interested in music, and he wanted to do production work. We have lots of people doing production work, and that's something that he could do. And I would guess that he would be more happy as an individual and have more sense of his own ability to affect the world.

MERROW: That's not the question. The question is, are you going to make him unhappy by this kind of argument, if, in fact, he ends up a mechanic?

HARWOOD: Well, the way the society sorts people and pegs people is a problem. And what I'm talking about is a way you can improve that problem. There are people who like mechanics. I mean, that's just a fact of life. There are people who like to do a lot of things, and I would guess that if you had a more natural sorting process and a more natural educational process that the work would get done. I mean, you have to look at things like looking at existing communes, that is, groups of sophisticated white, middle-class people, who have gone out into the country or into the city somewhere and decided to live self-sufficient lives. If you look at that experience, and you'll find that if they do have consentual decision-making process about labor, and they let people choose jobs that they like to do out of what's available, 80 or 90 percent of the jobs are taken care of automatically. It isn't that the massive amount of the work doesn't need to be done. If we've got a massive amount of work that nobody wants to do, I would guess that the work (1) doesn't really need to be done, and (2) if it were kind of worked around in a different way might become something that people want to do, but I would guess that's the problem -- not that we have to somehow shove people into the existing roles and make them like it, and if we raise their expectations, that they should be able to do something that makes sense to them, that we're somehow making a failure out of their lives -- I would guess that that ought to be a real strong aim among people, to find something that they think is valuable and enjoy doing as a job.

MERROW: And it's in the schools that those expectations ought to be nurtured?

HARWOOD: Well, I would guess that television is a more powerful influence than the school, just for instance. And I would guess that 75 or 80 percent of the education of the average person takes place outside of the school, and sure the school does this, and the school does that, and so does the rest of society, and so does television. So does the church, so does a lot of things, but you can't really sort it out and say the school does it. The school only reflects societal values, the way I see it.

BLAIR: William Harwood of the New Schools Exchange. This clearing house for ideas and alternative education is run by Harwood, his wife Grace, and a number of other people from their farm in Pettigrew, Arkansas. The farm, like the New Schools Exchange, is a communal operation.

MERROW: And I suppose that his observations about sharing work responsibilities grow out of his own experience there, but we should point out that most research about intentional communities indicates that these groups usually break up and disappear within a few years. So, attractive as that argument for work sharing may sound, I'm afraid that it wouldn't wash with corporate or government efficiency experts. Bill raises another interesting point, about the tracking or grouping of dumb kids and smart kids. The research indicates that the sorting is not only on the basis of high and low achievement. In fact, 40 percent of the scholastically unsuccessful, but well-to-do high school kids go on to college, while only 10 percent of the scholastically and economically poor students enter college.

BLAIR: That young McDonald's waitress said that working is part of a teenager's life. And that seems to be borne out by the number of kids holding down part-time jobs and going to school. Whether part-time work has any effect, beneficial or otherwise, on performance in school is something we know very little about. But part-time work unquestionably does influence subsequent career choices, because people get accustomed to doing what they're already doing, or they learn that that particular job is not for them.

During our examination of the problem of under employment and unemployment these last two weeks, we've discovered there are no simple solutions. In fact, the situation may get worse. There are fewer good jobs, which leads some people to conclude that we should be sharing and conserving, but the competition probably will become more intense every year another graduating class enters the job market. So, the problem persists: How does a society train its young people for adulthood and for work?

MERROW: If you'd like a transcript of this two-part series, send 50¢ to National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Ask for Programs No. 40 and 41. The two cassettes are available for $8.00.

BLAIR: Before we give that address again, we'd like you to help us improve OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. We'll send a questionnaire to everyone who writes us about the program, so we can hear your views about education and this series. Write us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036.

MERROW: This program was produced with the special assistance of Cathy Primus Goldstein.

(MUSIC)

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BLAIR: This program is produced by Jo Ellyn Rackleff. The Executive Producer is John Merrow. For OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, I'm Wendy Blair.

CHILD: This is NPR -- National Public Radio.

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